

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 001631

SIPDIS

NEA FOR BURNS/SATTERFIELD
NEA/SA/EX FOR AUSTIN-FERGUSON; DEPT FOR DS/IP/ITA; DEPT FOR
DS/IP/NEA; DRL FOR A/S CRANER
NSC FOR ABRAMS/DANIN
USAID FOR DCHA, DCHA/FFP
CENTCOM FOR GENERAL ABIZAID

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KWBG](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [PHUM](#) [CASC](#) [KPAL](#)

SUBJECT: THE SITUATION ON THE GROUND: MARCH 16, 2004; (1630
HOURS LOCAL) - RUMORS IN GAZA OF INTERNATIONAL EVACUATION;
CHILD IN WEST BANK UNWITTINGLY TRANSPORTS BOMB

THIS IS A JOINT MESSAGE FROM CONGEN JERUSALEM AND EMBASSY TEL
AVIV

1. (SBU) Summary. Israeli press reports suggesting that a "severe" military crackdown on Gaza was likely following last week's suicide bombing at Ashdod port and a rumor that internationals were being ordered to leave Gaza, fueled widespread concern that internationals were preparing to evacuate the Gaza Strip. An unspecified number of German diplomats reportedly left, but most of the German mission remained, according to UNRWA. Posts have received no reports of evacuations by other diplomatic missions. In the West Bank, a child who regularly earns money carting bags from one side of a checkpoint to the other for travelers was reportedly caught transporting a bomb through a checkpoint near Nablus. According to press reports, the child did not know he was carrying a bomb. The bomb was safely defused. End Summary.

West Bank

2. (SBU) ATTACKS:

-- Deaths: Nil.

-- Injuries: Roughly 18 Palestinians were injured in clashes with the IDF over the separation barrier near Bayt Liqya on March 15.

-- Bombs Defused: Israeli soldiers defused a bomb that a child between the ages of 10 and 12 had tried to carry through the Huwara checkpoint, near Nablus, on March 15. According to Israeli media, the child, who earns money carting bags from one side of the checkpoint to the other for travelers, did not know the contents of the bag. The boy was released after being questioned by the IDF for a few hours.

3. (SBU) ARRESTS/PRISONER ISSUES:

-- Israeli troops arrested six Fatah activists in Zabada, near Jenin, on March 15 during a meeting with village council officials. Three of the six activists were later released.

4. (SBU) BARRIER:

-- The Israeli High Court ordered the IDF to cease work on the separation barrier in Ni'lin village, near Qiryat Sefer, on March 15, pending review of the barrier's impact on nearby residents.

Gaza Strip

5. (SBU) ATTACKS:

-- Deaths: Nil.

-- Injury: A 23-year-old Palestinian woman was shot in the leg as the result of clashes between the IDF and Palestinian militants near Rafah at 1220 hours on March 16.

-- Injury: Two members of the Palestinian security services were wounded in a firefight with IDF, after the IDF destroyed a building near Netzarim, just south of Gaza city (see demolitions).

Mortars/Rockets/Shootings:

-- The IDF reported eight shootings, one mortar shell, and three anti-tank missiles in Gaza. No Israeli injuries resulted.

-- Demolition: The IDF demolished an abandoned building that

previously served as a college but which had been more recently used by PA security services. The IDF claimed that the building had been used by gunmen to fire at Israeli troops. The IDF also uprooted 40 dunams of citrus and olive trees during this action, according to UNRWA.

-- Demolition: The IDF demolished a home near Rafah. Ten persons were made homeless, according to UNRWA.

16. (SBU) BORDER CROSSINGS/CHECKPOINTS

-- Route Four (Salahadeen Road), the main north-south traffic artery, remained open.

-- Erez Crossing was closed for Palestinian laborers and Palestinian staff of international organizations and NGOs. The crossing was open for internationals, but vehicle access remained forbidden.

-- Sufa Crossing was open for transfer of aggregates, but closed for laborers.

-- Karni Terminal, the only Gaza Strip-GOI crossing for the import and export of goods, was open.

-- Rafah Terminal was open.

--The Al-Mowassi checkpoints at Tel al-Sultan and Toufah were open.

17. (SBU) POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS:

-- There were widespread rumors in Gaza March 16 that internationals were evacuating in anticipation of a possible harsh IDF crackdown on Gaza. A separate rumor said internationals were being ordered to leave by the GOI. Israeli media reported that PM Sharon had reportedly asked the IDF to "prepare a more severe response (to the March 14 Ashdod suicide bombings) than usual." According to UNRWA, an unspecified number of German diplomats left the Gaza Strip, but others from the German mission remained. Posts have had no reports of other diplomatic missions evacuating staff members.

-- Heavy gun fire was reported in Gaza city as university students fired into the air to celebrate university elections. Posts do not have firm numbers but reportedly Fatah won a majority of the positions. No injuries were reported from the gunfire.

Visit Embassy Tel Aviv's Classified Website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/telaviv>

You can also access this site through the State Department's Classified SIPRNET website.

KURTZER